ORCAWALE 2001: Weekly Report for 10/11/01 to 10/17/01

Sarah Mesnick

At this writing, and for most of the past week, we find ourselves caught between opposing forces of nature. A low pressure area centered over southern California and a high pressure area in the eastern North Pacific follow the simple laws of physics – strong winds strive to balance the inequity, blowing from high pressure to low, from north to south. This isn't a storm, but a pressure gradient. In fact it is for the most part sunny out, but the 25 - 35 knot winds and the high swell they generate, prevent us from working. We feel much like a bouncing cork in the big blue sea. Winds and swell are predicted to increase tonight. As Jose says, "at least we're all together".

This report covers our transit along the far western boundary of the study area at latitudes from the southern California Bight to Cape Mendocino. For the distance we have traveled, our on-effort time and sighting rate is dismally low, due to the above mentioned wind and swell. One sperm whale sighting started the week off right. Upon surfacing after an 85 minute dive (!), in full Beaufort 5 conditions, Chico, and the visual and acoustic team, skillfully maneuvered the small boat within range for biopsy and photos. Close but not close enough, with only a 5 minute surface interval, he was down again.

A few short-beaked common dolphin sightings provided the other marine mammalian interest for the week. Dorsal fin coloration in eastern Pacific animals varies latitudinally south to north, from black to white. Schools we have seen north of Point Conception consist predominantly of individuals with mostly white dorsal fins, but the schools are highly variable, not only in dorsal fin coloration but also in cape, head and beak coloration. As the week continued, we collected multiple biopsies, photos and video from these schools, which also contain some dark morph animals. A single fin whale sighting rounds out the week.

This week, birthdays are celebrated, Leigh and Juan Carlos's. Art projects near completion, books read, movies watched; we await better weather.

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101101 1102 N33:32.79 W123:52.88
                                  30.5nmi
                                           4.8
       1441 N33:40.85 W124:28.19
101201 1433 N34:31.92 W125:48.96
                                   4.6nmi 5.0
       1517 N34:36.58 W125:45.99
101401 0740 N37:11.31 W126:35.40
                                   5.5nmi 5.0
       0835 N37:12.70 W126:44.04
101501 0754 N37:33.08 W128:07.39
                                  95.6nmi 4.1
       1850 N38:14.11 W129:26.70
101601 0801 N38:49.11 W129:15.78
                                  12.1nmi 5.3
       0926 N39:00.43 W129:10.93
Code
                            Species
                                        Tot#
   17
                shortbeak common dolphin
   46
                             sperm whale
                                            1
                               fin whale
                                            1
                                   TOTAL
                                            8
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Biopsy (Juan Carlos Salinas and Erin LaBrecque) Photo-ID (Todd Chander, Leigh Torres and Laura Morse)

		Biopsy		Photo
Species	#Biopsies	Cumulative	#ID-Photos	Cumulative
•	(this week)	Total	(this week)	Total
	,		,	
Physeter macrocephalus	0	9	0	16
Balaenoptera musculus	0	10	0	14
Balaenoptera physalus	1	10	0	15
Megaptera novaeangliae	0	15	0	22
Delphinus delphis	11	56	2	13
Grampus griseus	0	1	0	1
Lagenorhyncus obliquidens	0	8	0	0
Lissodelphis borealis	0	14	0	0
Phocoenoides dalli	0	8	0	0
Orcinus orca	0	2	0 .	18
Eschrictius robustus	0	3	0	7
Stenella coeruleoalba	0	0	0	1
Tursiops truncatus	0	3	0	0
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Total	11	139	2	107

Oceanography (Candice Hall)

Day	#CTDs	#XBTs	#Bongos	Notes
11 October	1	4	1	
12 October	1	4	1	
13 Ocotber	0	0	0	weather
14 October	1	3	1	stationary
15 October	1	4	1	3
16 October	1	4	0	weather
17 October	0	4	0	weather

Seabirds (Michael Force and Cornelia Oedekoven)

Once again our offshore tracks of the past week have been accompanied by the usual gang of suspects: Leach's Storm-Petrels, Red Phalaropes and Black-footed Albatross, all in low abundances. The southbound migration of boreal nesters such as Arctic Terns and jaegers is pretty well over, recording only the occasional straggler. Species of interest include a Red-tailed Tropicbird and a couple of Cook's Petrels. Lost migrants are still in evidence such as a Savannah Sparrow, an immature Ring-billed Gull, a flock of Canada Geese and a Ringed Turtle-Dove. This endearing domestic species has made the wet lab his home for the past week. His (her?) favorite food must be Rick's chocolate chip and oatmeal cookies!!! Just can't seem to get enough (hint to Rick).

Acoustics (Shannon Rankin and Tony Martinez)

The week started off with a bang... or rather, a click, as acoustics detected a sperm whale passing near the ship. We were able to get the visual team on the animal and attempt a biopsy before the seas picked up sufficiently and locked us indoors for several days. In our brief reprieve from movie mania we were able to keep busy with two schools of vocalizing common dolphins and a total of seven schools that were not detected by the visual observers. Most of these schools were heard from great distance and were out of the visual survey effort range.